



FY 2016
Department of Development Services
Service Plan

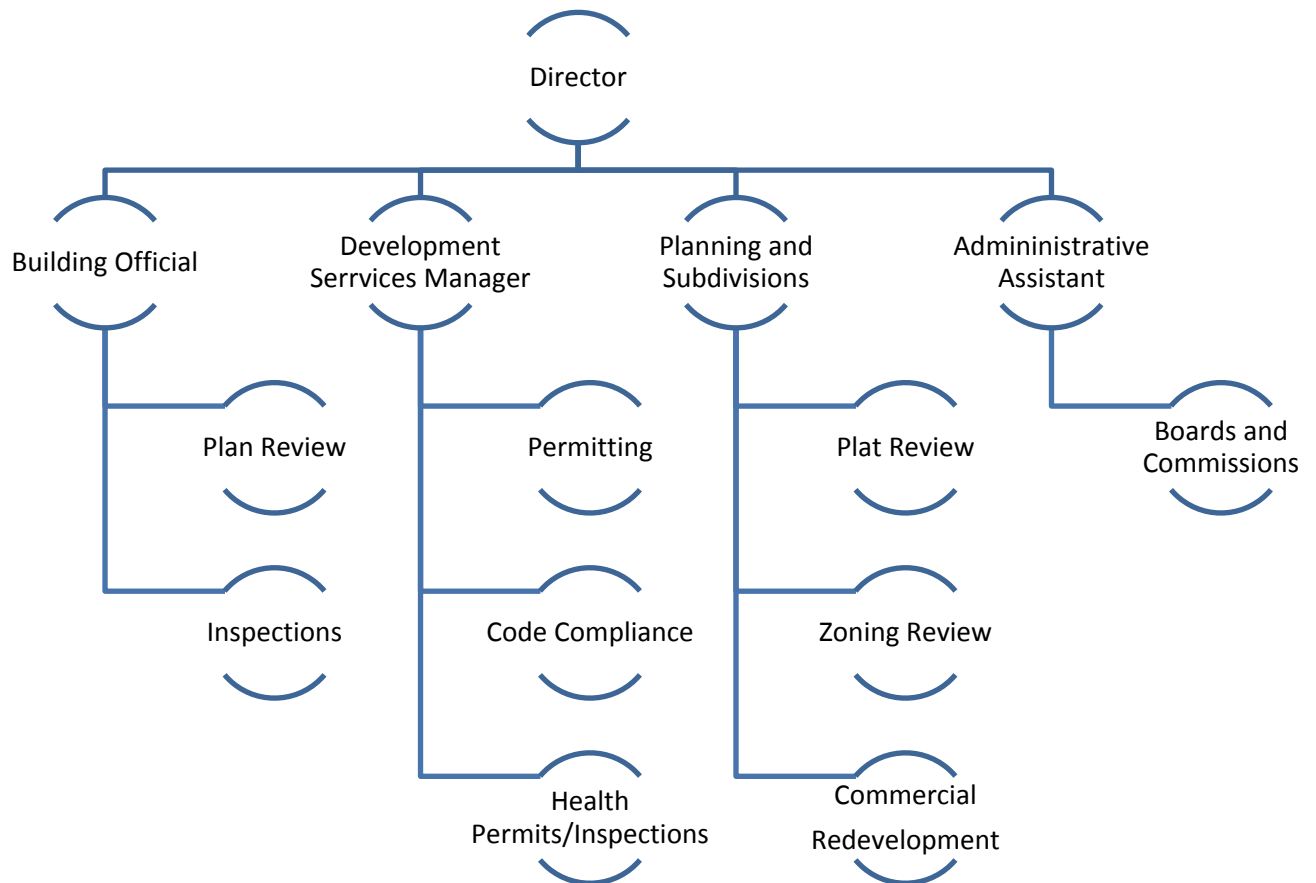
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Why Statement

The Development Services Department provides plan review, permits and inspections, code compliance, development review, and long-range planning services for the citizens, property owners, businesses, contractors, and builders. These services provide for the protection of the health, safety, and welfare of all who live and work in the City of Bellaire. The dedicated employees of this department work diligently to provide these services efficiently and effectively while providing the highest level of service.

Who's Responsible for What



What Does the Department Do

The function of the Development Services Department is to ensure good development and provide for a safe environment by enforcing the regulations associated with the health, safety, and welfare of the City of Bellaire, as well as to ensure that development is in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan.

Service: Building Plan Review

The Building Plan Review service is comprised of both new construction and remodel plans for residential and commercial buildings. Building plan review offers a comprehensive review of both residential and commercial plans that include verifying that the plans comply with building, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, fuel gas, energy, zoning, and other adopted codes.

Permit applications are first submitted through the permit desk. Plans are then routed to the plan examiners to verify designs are in compliance with codes and ordinances. Tree and Sign permits are assigned to the Code Compliance Officer for review. Drainage plans are forwarded to the City Engineer for review. Subsequent comments and meetings typically follow to ensure plans are compliant prior to approval. Approved plans are then required at job sites to verify code compliant construction by inspection personnel.

Activity: Daily Building Plan Review

Plans are reviewed daily in an effort to meet Department turnaround times by both City Inspectors and contract inspectors.

Service: Code Compliance

Through the Code Compliance Program, city staff works to protect the health, safety and welfare of Bellaire residents through the reasonable enforcement of the City's codes and ordinances. Code Compliance works with multiple city departments in the enforcement of the Code of Ordinances, the Zoning and Sign Ordinances, and the Tree Ordinances. By conducting both proactive and responsive code compliance efforts, the Department ensures that the homes and businesses throughout Bellaire are well maintained and remain in compliance with applicable codes and ordinances.

Activity: Code Compliance

Code Compliance has divided the City into twelve zones. The Code Compliance Officer (CCO) conducts a drive by inspection of a one zone per day. Additionally, the CCO responds daily to complaints filed by residents through the Resident Request Tracker system, email, or by phone.

Service: Development Review

Staff reviews applications for compliance with the Subdivisions and Zoning ordinances. Development cases include:

- Minor/Amending Plats (administrative review)
- Preliminary, Final, and Amending (P&Z review)
- Specific Use Permits (SUP's)
- Planned Development (PD's) (Custom zoning districts)
- Zoning Amendments (written and zoning map)
- Variances
- Special Exceptions

Staff notes where there are code or other regulatory issues, or instances where clarification is needed. When issues arise, staff communicates with the applicant to ensure that submittals are updated.

Activity: Compliance Certification

Once all items are addressed, staff certifies that applications meet codes and administratively approve the applications for which staff has authority. These cases include: minor/amending plats, site plans, zoning verifications, and other miscellaneous cases. Those documents that require filing with the County Clerk's Office are handled by staff with follow-up confirmation with the applicants.

Activity: Case Liaison for Applications

In the case of applications that require action by a specific board or commission, the documents are prepared for the appropriate meeting. Staff works with the applicant to gather information before recommending action. The Planning and Zoning Commission has final authority on all plats other than those assigned to staff for administrative approval. The commission meets monthly.

For zoning cases, the Commission functions as a recommending body to the City Council. This includes zoning cases, SUP's, PD's, and amendments. Once the Commission has held any required hearings and rendered a recommendation, these items are sent to the City Council for a final determination. The Commission also makes recommendations on the Comprehensive Plan (handled by Development Services) and the Capital Improvement Program (brought forward by the City Manager's Office).

In the case of a request for a Zoning variance or where there is an appeal filed against an administrative official applying zoning regulations, cases are brought forward by staff to the Board of Adjustment for a final decision.

Every case requires detailed staff reports with technical information and presentations, as well as a professional recommendation from the Development Services staff for the decision making body.

When public hearings are required, staff ensures that all public legal notice documents are prepared, including creation of a vicinity map, explanation, legal descriptions, and address checks per statutory and code requirements. Legal notices are forwarded to the proper media outlets, notices are mailed and posted, and the website is updated. In addition, staff verifies that the applicant has properly posted the required signs onsite.

Permitting and customer services are provided by a staff of two, which is made up of two Building Permit Technicians. Assistance is provided by the Development Services Manager, building inspectors and the Code Compliance Officer.

Permits are issued from 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Monday thru Friday to walk-in customers and by facsimile. Customers pay by cash or check, except Plumbers, who have the option to pay by credit card.

Issuing permits includes the process of registering contractors to include insurance status, verifying that the appropriate applications have been completed and that the required number of drawings has been submitted. Permitting also verifies construction values and helps determine the types of required inspections necessary for the permit being issued.

Customer service is also provided via telephone and email.

Who Does the Department Serve

The Development Services Department serves a variety of customers to include:

- Residents (enforcement of regulations, issuance of permits, and Code Compliance);
- Property owners (Subdivisions, Zoning, Code Compliance);
- Businesses and Business Owners (Zoning, Health Inspections, Code Compliance, Development Review);
- Engineers and Architects (code review, plan review);
- Builders and Contractors (permitting, plan review, inspections);
- Utility Companies (permitting, plan review) ; and
- City of Bellaire (plan review, permitting, comprehensive planning, analysis).

Additionally, the Department serves as staff support for the Planning and Zoning Commission, Building and Standards Commission, and Board of Adjustment.

Service Level Expectations

Department: Development Services		Expected Results
Building Plan Review		
New Construction	Process and initial review of building plans for new residential and commercial construction	15 business days
	Process and follow up review on updated plans based on comments made previously	10 business days
Remodel/Addition	Process and initial review of building plans for additions and remodels to residential and commercial structures	12 business days
	Process and follow up review on updated plans based on comments made previously	5 business days
Code Compliance		
Field Observation	Conduct field inspections of each of the City's (12) zones to identify code violations	One zone per day
Complaints	Initial response to code issues filed via email, phone, mail, or Citizen Request Tracker	2 business days
Inspections		
Building	Process request and perform inspection	1 business day
Health Inspection	All food service providers to be inspected twice per year	2 times per year
Development Review		
Plats	Initial review and comments to applicant	10 business days
Zoning Applications	Initial review and comments to applicant	10 business days
	Follow up	5 business days
	Commission packets	6 days before meeting

Budget

Revenues/Expenditures

Annual Budget			
Department/Fund	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Budget	FY 2016 Projections
FTE's	9	8	8
Revenues			
Permits	673,103	747,750	775,000
Fees	246,611	331,900	385,000
Total	919,714	1,079,650	1,160,000
Expenditures			
Personnel	650,209	660,793	640,000
Professional Services	173,100	202,839	202,839
Maintenance	1,955	2,500	2,500
Other Services	9,697	14,175	14,175
Materials & Supplies	10,023	14,785	14,785
Total	844,985	895,092	874,299

Fiscal Forecast

Fiscal Forecast			
Department/Fund	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2018
FTE's	8	8	8
Revenues			
Permits	786,000	825,300	866,565
Fees	400,000	420,000	441,000
Total	1,186,000	1,245,300	1,307,565
Expenditures			
Personnel	683,921	707,900	732,500
Professional Services	205,000	211,000	217,000
Maintenance	2,500	2,500	2,500
Other Services	15,000	15,500	15,750
Materials & Supplies	15,000	15,250	15,500
Total	921,421	952,150	983,250

Environmental Scan

The Development Services Department provides services through a combination of full-time staff and contract services. At present, the Department has eight FTE budgeted. Contract inspection services supplement staff building inspectors. Health Inspections are contracted out as well, though Food Truck and Parks related food services are handled in-house. Drainage review services are provided by the City Engineer's office.

Bellaire is a predominately residential city with key commercial centers and corridors. The Census Bureau set the 2010 population at 16,855 and shows an increase to 18,252 for 2014. However, as Bellaire is predominately built out with minimum new housing coming in, this number would seem to be inflated. With no ETJ or sizeable open land, this situation will not change in the foreseeable future.

New housing starts are generally on previously developed residential lots. Mid-20th century residences are replaced by newer, larger, upscale homes. Economic indicators for the Greater Houston housing market are still strong. Growth is still prevalent in the new subdivisions and new home market. However, Bellaire is a microcosm that does not necessarily see the same trends as the region as a whole. Bellaire rarely sees new subdivisions and the few that have been developed over the last few years have been small (8-11 homes). Redevelopment of existing lots has been generally steady over the last few years but much lower than the peak of the early 2000's. In the recent past, residential building has been negatively affected by the tightening of the mortgage markets as banks have made it more difficult to secure large mortgages for new home buyers. Builders have also just recently begun building specs homes again. This is an issue that could restrict building in the future.

Though the occasional remodel and tenant replacement leads to minor renovations, Bellaire's commercial sector has been generally stagnant when it comes to new buildings. This will change when HEB begins replacement of their current store with a new 70,000 square foot replacement scheduled to break ground in the January 2017. This project will serve as a catalyst for other redevelopment projects in the downtown area.

The Urban Village – TOD (UVT) district has not evolved as originally conceptualized. This is due in part to the failure of METRO to expand light rail down Westpark, allowing connection to greater Houston. Political activity at the Federal level prevented METRO from completing their planned expansion. Uptown Houston does have a plan for a bus rapid transit station just to the west, which would connect the UVT to the Galleria area, though this project has not moved as quickly as originally envisioned. There is some hope that the light rail station and line may be back on track in the future as the hold that was originally placed on the project has been conditionally lifted. Additionally, the Houston portion of the 2008 Bellaire Town Center Vision Plan developed radically different then as proposed. This development also removed the possibility of connecting the UVT district to South Rice to increase accessibility.

Available Assets

Vehicles

- Four Pickup Trucks
 - Two Ford F150 trucks
 - Two Ranger compact trucks (one Ranger is scheduled for replacement by a Ford F150 in Spring 2016)

City Departments

- Public Works
 - Assist with rights-of-way issues, code enforcement
- City Engineer
 - Drainage review, development review
- City Attorney
 - Legal advice, Board and Commission Support, Ordinance review

Boards and Commissions

- Planning and Zoning
 - Advice and review of planning and subdivision proposals.
- Building and Standards
 - Advice and review of building related issues.
- Board of Adjustment
 - Advice and review of zoning variance and interpretation issues.

Future Service Enhancements

2017

- New Planner position
- Professional services funds for Floodplain Management Plan and to initiate CRS Review

2018

- Professional services funds to complete CRS review and program to initiate reduction in rating

Annual Enhanced Budget			
Department/Fund	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019
FTE's	+1	0	0
Revenues			
Source			
Total			
Expenditures			
Personnel	62,000		
Professional Services	75,000	25,000	
Maintenance			
Contractual Services			
Materials & Supplies			
Total			

Future Strategy

In an effort to approve the provision of services and provide current services in a more efficient and effective manner, the Department's plans for the future include the following enhancements and initiatives:

1) **New Position - Planner**

Currently, there are a number of planning related duties handled by various employees of the Development Services Department. This proposed position would be responsible for the following duties that are currently handled by other staff:

- Tree Permit review approval;
- Sign Permit review and approval;
- Amending Plat review
- Zoning Case review
- Comprehensive Plan follow-up and management

Additionally, the position would cross train with Permit Tech positions to provide an extra layer of support at the Permit Desk.

As the number of in-house building inspectors has decreased from a high of five to the current two, it has reduced the ability of our field personnel to assist in the code compliance area with less eyes on the streets. This has added to the responsibility of the code compliance officer and increased the position's workload.

This new position would free up the Code Compliance Officer (trees/signs) to spend more time in the field and allow the position to increase the Department's focus on proactive enforcement of the many Codes for which the position is responsible. The plat review, zoning case review, and Comprehensive Plan duties are all currently assigned to the Director. This new position would place these duties at the proper level of responsibility and allow the Director to focus on management of the department, comprehensive analysis of the subdivision, zoning, and health ordinances, and continued in depth involvement with builders and developers looking to revitalize the commercial sectors.

2) **Technology**

At present, the Development Services Department is heavily dependent on paper. All permit applications and plans are submitted on paper requiring excessive handling of documents and leading to long term filing and storage issues. Working with the IT Director, the Department will review software and online alternatives that will allow for the electronic application of permits and the submittal and review of building plans. Additionally, hardware upgrade needs will be identified and budgeted for to allow the effective use of the new programs.

Furthermore, the Department will need additional funds to allow for the digitalization of the massive amounts of Commercial building plans that are currently stored within the department. Commercial building plans are required to be held for the life of the building. This investment will allow for the proper storage and more efficient access to the stored plans.

3) Training

The Department has been working to increase the relationship between the Permit Technicians and the Building Inspectors. Over the last year, the Permit Techs have started performing certificate of occupancy, demolition, flatwork, and t-pole inspections. The Department plans on expanding this program to begin training to certify the Permit Techs in building plan review in an effort to both better assist the inspectors and enhance their ability to provide customer service at the front desk.

4) Flood Plain Issues

FEMA is requiring the completion and submittal of a new Floodplain Mitigation Plan. Though past due, FEMA is allowing us to do turn in an annual update this year as long as the City shows that we are moving forward on the new Plan. Funds to supplement the City Engineer's contract will be requested in FY2017 to complete this action.

Additionally, under the National Flood Insurance Program, the City's award under the Community Rating System is designated for audit in 2017/2018. The City currently has a rating of 7 under the 2007 scoring system. In 2013 the system was updated and our rating will now be scored under the new system. This could potentially lead to a downgrade if points are lost. Funding will be needed to conduct an in-house audit of the rating and develop methods to regain any lost points. Also, the Department plans to investigate what would be needed to obtain a rating of 6, which would further lower flood insurance rates for property owners in Bellaire.